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MICHIGAN COASTAL NEWS

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Coastal Day Trip and Vacation Planning

Long days, warm weather, and temperate waters will be calling Michigan sunbathers, boaters, and just about everybody else to our Great Lakes coast this summer. We hope you have a chance to get outdoors and heed the call! Lots of information is out there to help you plan and prepare for your trip, and this issue of Michigan Coastal News features some of these ideas, tips, and tools.

One of the most visited state travel websites in the U.S. is the Michigan Economic Development Corporation's www.michigan.org. Visitors to the site can search for travel information by a number of themes, including city or geographic area, attractions, events, and type of recreation or activity. The site also presents suggested driving tours organized around thematic points of interest. We recommend a look at the Michigan Maritime Tours, such as the "Lights of Northern Lake Huron," "Northwest Michigan Ports of Call," or the "Great Waters Lake Superior Trail." Recently, information on designated Michigan Clean Marinas was added to the site, making it easier for environmentally conscious boaters to support marinas that have made a voluntary, proven commitment to protect water quality.

People heading to the beach may find helpful information on a couple of websites. The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality's statewide beach database provides the names and basic location information for all public beaches in Michigan, and current information on beach closures or swimming advisories. The web address is www.deq.state.mi.us/beach/public/default.aspx. Coastal beachgoers contemplating a dip in the water can get an idea of how warm it will be before they leave home, thanks to Michigan Sea Grant's CoastWatch website at www.coastwatch.msu.edu. The website presents frequently updated surface water temperature maps for each Great Lake, based on real-time satellite imagery provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Finally, boaters may want to bookmark the Michigan Department of Natural Resources searchable public boat launch directory at www.mcgi.state.mi.us/MRBIS. The site provides a wide range of information on more than 1,300 public boating access sites and over 80 harbors and marinas.

Whatever is your favorite form of coastal "R&R," we encourage you to get out and enjoy it this summer!





Photo credit: Janis Layne

Nearly 300 kayakers participated in "Paddle by Your Refuge" last September at Elizabeth Park in Trenton. The event, held to raise funds for the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance, took place on a portion of the new Detroit Heritage River Water Trail. This year's event is scheduled for September 16th, again at Elizabeth Park

the river also remains important to the region's natural heritage, and most of the blueway's first phase is within the 5,000-acre Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. Today, paddlers can glide quietly past downriver communities and enjoy an unusual, water-based perspective of lighthouses, historic homes, industry, uninhabited islands, wetlands, wildlife, and – a rare sight in Michigan – American lotus beds.

MAC took the lead in coordinating the blueway planning project with Coastal Zone Management grant support. The planning effort involved the participation of a multitude of riverfront communities, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, kayaking interests, nonprofit organizations, and the public. The ultimate vision for the blueway is a 120-mile water trail network running the length of the Detroit River, lower Rouge and Huron Rivers, along the Lake Erie shore and up the lower River Raisin. The overall blueway plan is segmented into a number of phases and MAC is working with different communities and groups to implement portions of the water trail. While kayakers and canoeists are now actively paddling the water trail from the many existing access points across the region, new launches and signage are currently being developed along the first phase route, which flows along the lower Huron and Detroit Rivers – about 30 miles of water trail. Maps and other information on the Detroit Heritage River Water Trail are available at www.mac-web.org/Projects/HeritageWaterTrail.htm.

Project Profile: Detroit Heritage River Water Trail

Outdoor recreation enthusiasts are familiar with greenway trails, or public recreational trails for pedestrians and cyclists that wind through parks, preserves, and other open spaces. Less well-known are blueway trails, the aquatic counterparts of greenways planned and designed for canoeists and kayakers. Recently, the blueways concept has been attracting more attention from communities eager to promote healthy recreation, boost tourism, and improve local quality of life. For Great Lakes coastal communities in particular, water trails offer yet another way to showcase their most alluring asset.

A new blueway joined the ranks of Michigan's water trails last September, when Metropolitan Affairs Coalition (MAC), a Detroit-area civic organization, formally unveiled the Detroit Heritage River Water Trail. The new trail promises a rich experience for paddlers. The Detroit River is designated as a Heritage River by both the United States and Canadian federal governments in recognition of its prominence in the history of the two nations. Although major stretches of the shoreline are developed and industrialized

Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary Improves Access to Shipwrecks

SCUBA divers, snorkelers, and kayakers visiting NOAA's Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary off Alpena, Michigan will find it easier to locate some of its renowned historic shipwrecks, thanks to a seasonal mooring buoy program now in its 4th year. More than 50 shipwrecks rest on the bottom of the 448 square mile Marine Sanctuary in northwestern Lake Huron. Cold water and the absence of marine life that thickly blankets submerged objects in saltwater have kept the shipwrecks in a remarkable state of preservation. Consequently, Thunder Bay is one of the premier recreational diving destinations in the Midwest, and one of the best places in the world to view a wide variety of historic sunken vessels.

This year, Sanctuary staff placed highly visible mooring buoys at 17 shipwreck sites. The moorings provide a safe means of descent to the wrecks for divers and snorkelers, and boaters mooring their craft to the buoys avoid the possibility of anchor damage to the submerged vessels and associated artifacts. A number of the wrecks served by the buoys are in shallow water and may be appreciated by kayakers. The majority of buoys are white with a horizontal blue stripe, lighted for nighttime visibility, and contain radar reflectors so larger vessels can locate them in the fog. The buoys are positioned on the sites seasonally, and are placed in early May and removed after mid-September. For more information on the buoys and marked sites in 2007, contact Wayne Lusardi, (989) 356-8805 extension 11 or wayne.lusardi@noaa.gov.

New State General Permit for Great Lakes Shoreline Management

Starting this summer, shoreline property owners on Michigan's Great Lakes coast may take advantage of a timelier and lower-cost permitting option for limited types of shoreline management projects. The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is preparing to issue a new state general permit for sand leveling and grooming in areas free of vegetation, establishing paths to the water, limited mowing of vegetation, and controlling *Phragmites* and other non-native, invasive plants. The new general permit option addresses projects located between the ordinary high watermark of the Great Lakes and the water's edge – that is, on exposed state-owned bottomlands adjacent to shoreline property. The application fee for a general permit is \$100, substantially less than individual permit fees. Also, general permit processing does not include the public notice period or possibility of a public hearing required for individual permit applications.

DEQ officials developed the general permit in response to the expiring provisions of Public Act 14 of 2003, the much-publicized "beach grooming" law. The law temporarily allowed shoreline property owners on Saginaw and Grand Traverse Bays to destroy wetland vegetation growing on exposed bottomlands without a state permit until June, 2006. It also allows shoreline landowners to rake and level sand, mow vegetation, and conduct other activities on exposed bottomlands until November 1, 2007. Importantly, the law also required the State to determine the impacts of these "beach grooming" activities and report them to the Legislature.



Photo credit Joe Haas

Native wetland vegetation growing on exposed bottomlands has important habitat value and helps stabilize the shoreline from erosion when lake levels rise.

Scientists from Michigan State University, Grand Valley State University, and the Michigan Natural Features Inventory conducted the required studies. The peer-reviewed research showed that activities allowed under Public Act 14 significantly harm coastal natural resources. Coastal wetlands are "nursery" areas for young sportfish, and the researchers found that destruction of native wetland vegetation on exposed bottomlands harms these fish and the small organisms they eat. Tourism related to sportfishing is an economic mainstay of many coastal communities, and these findings resonated with the public. The studies also showed that activities altering shoreline vegetation disrupt vegetation communities, decrease numbers of macroinvertebrates, and change the chemistry of water within and near the altered areas.

The DEQ crafted the new general permit provisions with input from the Legislature, conservation interests, shoreline property owners, and other stakeholders. The most damaging provisions of Public Act 14, such as eradication of wetland vegetation, are not included in the new general permit category. Agency staff expect to finalize and issue the general permit by July. The general permit language along with frequently asked questions, information on invasive species control, and a shorter, more user-friendly application form will be posted at www.michigan.gov/deqwetlands. The peer-reviewed research report on beach grooming impacts is currently available on the same website.

Report Highlights Need for Proactive Lakebed Habitat Conservation

Recent years have witnessed an increasing interest in siting offshore wind farms, oil and gas pipelines, and other energy-related infrastructure in the Great Lakes. Yet, the state of knowledge regarding important lakebed habitats is fragmented and incomplete, and the ability to regulate developments in Great Lakes waters varies among the Great Lakes states and province of Ontario.

This spring, the Great Lakes Fishery Commission (GLFC) released a 2006 project completion report examining the issue of lakebed habitat conservation in light of the growing demand for offshore energy projects. The report grew out of a GLFC-sponsored workshop held in September, 2005, with the participation of Great Lakes resource managers, fisheries biologists, coastal policy and regulatory program staff, and non-profit organizations. A key recommendation is identification and mapping of critical bottomland habitats, as well as areas where development would cause lesser impacts. The Michigan Coastal Management Program is now working with the MDNR Fisheries Division and University of Michigan to develop a lakebed habitat GIS.

The report may be viewed at <http://www.glfc.org/research/reports/Dempsey.pdf>.

Adopt-a-Beach Program Cares for Michigan's Shorelines and Beaches

Contributed by Jamie Cross, Alliance for the Great Lakes

It takes a community to care for our precious Great Lakes! The Alliance for the Great Lakes' Adopt-a-Beach program is a volunteer-based stewardship initiative that focuses on keeping the Great Lakes healthy through shoreline clean-ups. The program's impact at the local level is considerable. For example, during the one-day annual event last September, 1,935 volunteers removed over 7,000 pounds of trash at 106 shoreline locations in Michigan.

The Alliance has coordinated the annual September clean-up since 1991 with Coastal Zone Management grant support. More than 25,000 volunteers have participated over the years. The Michigan clean-ups are part of an international effort coordinated by The Ocean Conservancy in Washington, D.C. Beach clean-up participants collect data on the litter they find and remove, and the information gathered is used in pollution prevention and education projects in the Great Lakes region and around the world.

The Alliance launched a year-round Adopt-a-Beach program in 2002, at the request of volunteers who wanted more involvement in local beach stewardship. Currently, the year-round program includes teams of volunteers in Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana made up of businesses, community groups, schools, and families. Participants conduct basic water quality monitoring in addition to the litter clean-up and data collection.

Some teams are using their clean-up data and enthusiasm to make a difference at local beaches. For example, the Muskegon Save Our Shoreline Adopt-a-Beach team removed 4,530 cigarette butts in three hours during last September's clean-up event at Pere Marquette Park. The team is now working towards the goal of making part of the park smoke-free to reduce the amount of cigarette litter. Their efforts have sparked other proposals for smoke-free beaches in Muskegon and Ottawa Counties, and most recently the introduction of state legislation to make all public beaches in Michigan smoke-free.

To take part in the September 15, 2007, annual Adopt-a-Beach clean-up in your area, please refer to the volunteer opportunities section below.



Photo Credit: Jamie Cross

Volunteer for Michigan's Coast!

The Michigan DNR and Alliance for the Great Lakes would welcome volunteer help for workdays and beach clean-ups this summer:

- State Park Stewardship Workdays.** The DNR Parks and Recreation Division needs weekend volunteers to help remove invasive plants or collect native prairie seed at Algonac State Park, St. Clair County, and Sterling State Park, Monroe County. Workdays at Algonac are July 8, August 5, September 9, and September 29 (National Public Lands Day). The one workday at Sterling is also scheduled for September 29. Contact: Laurel Malvitz, (248) 359-9057, malvitzl@michigan.gov. Additional DNR volunteer opportunities are posted at www.michigan.gov/dnrvolunteers, click on "Calendar of Volunteer Stewardship Workdays."
- Adopt-a-Beach Clean-ups.** The Alliance for the Great Lakes is looking for volunteers to participate in the annual beach clean-ups at multiple locations on Michigan's coast on September 15th. The clean-ups can be enjoyable outings for families, or business, school, and community groups. Refer to the article on this page for more information on the clean-ups. Register on-line at www.greatlakes.org or contact Jamie Cross, (616) 850-0745, jcross@greatlakes.org.